



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Clarke

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Investigative Hearing - Lead Paint Poisoning and Baltimore's Children

FOR the purpose of assessing the status and accelerating the pace of eradicating lead paint poisoning in Baltimore City and Maryland as a whole and working to achieve consensus on the coordinated roles and investments required to spare Baltimore's families and children from another generation of this devastating and preventable disease.

Recitals

Banned in Baltimore in 1950 and by the federal government in 1978, lead paint still remains in hundreds of Baltimore City rental units, infecting young children when it deteriorates and children ingest or absorb lead particles or dust, for example, by sucking their fingers after touching a lead dust surface.

As described in The Baltimore Sun's report of December 6, 2015 (♦Kids still falling through cracks♦), ♦Even a minute dose can subtly damage a young child's developing brain and nervous system, studies show, making it harder for the child to learn to read, think, and retain information. Lead poisoning can also make it harder for a youngster to sit still, and make the child more prone to act out. Studies have found poisoned children are more likely to struggle in school and to get in trouble, both as juveniles and adults.♦ Children under 6 years old are the most vulnerable to lead poisoning and its effects.

Thanks to 1994 State legislation and the intensified collaboration between the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and Baltimore's Health and Housing departments ▲▲ and advocacy groups such as Baltimore's Green & Healthy Homes Initiative ▲▲ lead poisoning is less common than in the past, with new City cases dropping by 86% since 2002.

That 1994 law requires annual rental unit registrations; and, inspections, certifications, and public posting to confirm a unit's lead-safe status before rental to households with children. During tenancy, landlords are required to maintain the lead-safe status and provide temporary relocation if remediation is needed.

Despite dedicated leadership and personnel, the State's watchdog function and coordination with City agencies are compromised by limited personnel and inadequate database backup. MDE has fewer than a dozen inspectors to inspect 400,000 rental units throughout Maryland. Various databases lack coordination, making online tracking difficult. Rental unit registrations are lagging. City Housing inspection and code enforcement partner with MDE for lead paint compliance in Baltimore City, but the system is overwhelmed, reduced to responding to complaints in lieu of proactive and systematic enforcement.

One major additional concern is that, although no level of lead paint poisoning is without irreversible and lifelong physical and emotional effects, the legal level for lead poisoning in Maryland is 10 micrograms per deciliter (10ug/dL). As MDE reports, however, more than 1,000 Baltimore children tested between 5 and 9 micrograms per deciliter in 2013. The first 10ug/dL's are the most damaging, and these poisoned children are below the radar screen of an already overwhelmed system.

There are signs of encouragement. Governor Larry Hogan is launching an early warning system, urging medical providers to conduct blood tests for lead poisoning on all 1 and 2 year olds in Maryland. Only 20% are tested now. MDE is reaching out to engage City faith and higher education leaders in promoting this early testing and effective follow-up.

We urge the State to make that follow-up effective by revising its trigger lead level for enforcement to at least the 5ug/dL cited by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We likewise urge a major increase of State MDE funding to achieve personnel and data capacity sufficient to enforce the lead paint poisoning law effectively for the existing and hopefully expanded cohort of victims identified.

From the homefront, we ask our Baltimore City Housing, Health and non-profit representatives to meet with the City Council and help us involve our State MDE partners and Baltimore City families affected by lead paint poisoning in a dialogue to discuss the status of efforts to eradicate lead paint poisoning within a time certain and the specific financial and personnel resources required to do so at the local and State levels.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council calls for a hearing to assess the status, and accelerate the pace, of eradicating lead paint poisoning in Baltimore City and Maryland as a whole while encouraging efforts to achieve consensus on the coordinated roles and investments required to spare Baltimore's families and children from another generation of this devastating and preventable disease.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Governor, the Health Commissioner, the Deputy Housing Commissioner for Green, Healthy, and Sustainable Homes, the Deputy Director of the Maryland Department of the Environment's Office of Communications, the Deputy Secretary for Regulatory Programs & Policy in the Maryland

Department of the Environment, the Baltimore City Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, the President & CEO of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, the Director of the Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital, the Legislative Committee Chair of the Maryland Multi Housing Association, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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